"How like an Angel": Self-Fashioning in Pico della Mirandola and Raphael

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Abstract

The projected image of the philosopher Pico della Mirandola and the painter Raphael share a common trait: both were seen by contemporaries as angels. The role Pico and Raphael themselves played in the establishment of this assimilation is discussed, as is the theological and intellectual background of the function of angels in this period. Especially the latter is shown to make a biographical interpretation of angelic connotations in both figures such as presented by Vasari (Raphael) or Gianfrancesco Pico (Pico) extremely hazardous. Rather, elements of self-fashioning merge with theological and philosophical trends in the creation of the angelic image.

Keywords

Pico della Mirandola,
Raphael,
self-representation,
angels,
biography

The painter Raphael has been many things to many people: artistic genius, scholar, archeologist, entrepreneur, poet, to name but a few. If this hardly seems to make for a coherent profile and hence a single, individual artistic nature, the paradoxical truth is that, apart from Michelangelo, there has been no other Renaissance artist to whom a more explicit and unified character and nature was attributed. Raphael, to all who speak out on him, was a graceful young man, with love written all over him. The main source for this image is Vasari's *Vita*, which, partly for the sake of rhetorical contrast with his biography of Michelangelo, minimized the intellectual elements in Raphael's career.[1] One of the casualties due to this procedure was the philosophical content of Raphael's work. This has therefore, although present in the Romantic *Nachwuchs*,[2] only lately been able to rise to real prominence among the features defining 'Raphael'. The *Stanza della Segnatura* indeed, to take but one example, may be seen as a *summa* of the intellectual accomplishments of its time, as has been argued persuasively.[3] The question, then, is to what extent the painter himself wanted this 'intellectual background' to be part of his public profile, or, in other words, if his philosophy was a reflection of the demands of his patrons or was part of the image he consciously projected of himself. To a certain extent,

[1] For discussion and other reasons see Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics,* pp. 66-79.

[2] Löhneysen, *Raffael unter den Philosophen*.

[3] Rowland, 'The Intellectual Background' and Rowland, *The culture of the High Renaissance*; Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza*.

this question is anachronistic: the strict boundaries between disciplines such as art and philosophy postdate the Renaissance, which relished in *Kreuzung der Gattungen*. That Raphael is in fact a key figure in these cross-overs, may be seen in certain convergences of his public profile with that of the philosopher and theologian Pico della Mirandola, which are at issue in the following.

Three texts serve as my starting point. The first is a description of the philosopher Pico della Mirandola by his nephew and biographer, Gianfrancesco Pico[4] in the translation of Sir Thomas More:

> He was of feature and shape seemly and beauteous, of stature goodly and high, of flesh tender and soft, his visage lovely and fair, his colour white, intermingled with comely reds, his eyes grey and quick of look, his teeth white and even, his hair yellow and not too picked.[5]

The second is the description of the painter Raphael's person by Vasari, on the occasion of the self-portrait in the *School of Athens*: "a youthful head with an air of great modesty, filled with a pleasing and excellent grace"[6] Add to this as a third the description of the painter's manner by the humanist Celio Calcagnini, written towards the end of Raphael's life in a letter to a friend:

> The youth of superb goodness but admirable talent […] has inspired in Pope Leo and all Romans an admiration so great, that everyone looks up to him as if he were a divinity descended from the sky to restore the ancient city to its former majesty. Instead of stalking like a pelican because of this, he rather makes himself available and is friendly towards all of his own accord, never shrinking from anyone's advice or conversation, since no one rejoices more readily than he when his interpretations are called in doubt or discussion, and he considers both to teach and to learn the prize of life.[7]

The correspondences between these texts are clear: youth, beauty, tenderness, modesty and grace. Other characteristics of both men suggested here and made explicit in other sources are: ambiguity of gender, kindness, stately height, remarkable swiftness and dexterity, precocity and divinity or the ability to communicate with divine wisdom/beauty.[8]

Taken together, these elements point in a specific direction: that of angels. Angels are young, androgynous, helpful and kind, of a perfect beauty untainted by human flaws although of human form, clad in white, radiant and usually only recognized as such after having delivered their message and departed, a typology grafted on the Old Testament stories of Tobit, Abraham and

[4] Prefixed to Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia*, Basel 1572 [repr. Turin: Bottega d'Ersamo, 1971]: *Forma autem insigni fuit & liberali, procera et celsa statura, molli carne, venusta facie in universum albenti colore, decenti rubore interspersa, caesiis et vigilibus oculis, flavo et inaffectato capellitio, dentibus quoque candidis & aequalibus.*

[5] More, *The English Works*, I, p. 350.

[6] Vasari, *Le vite*, II, p. 204: *una testa giovane e d'aspetto molto modesto, accompagnata da una piacevole e buona grazia.*

[7] *Iuvenis summae bonitatis sed admirabilis ingenii* […] *ita Leonem Pontificem, ita omnes Quirites in admirationem erexit, ut quasi caelitus demissum numen ad aeternam Urbem in pristinam maiestatem reparandam omnes homines suspiciant. Quare tantum abest ut cristas erigat, ut multo magis se omnibus obvium et familiarem ultro reddat, nullius admonitionem aut colloquium refugiens, utpote quo nullus libentius sua commenta in dubium ac disputationem vocari gaudeat, docerique ac docere vitae praemium putet*, Calcagini in Shearman, *Raphael,* 1519-20/1.

[8] See Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics*, pp. 8-71 and Rijser, 'The Funerary Epigrams'.

Fig. 1: Cristofano Dell'Altissimo, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, 1552-1568, oil on panel, 59 × 45 cm, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gioviana Collection.

Lot.[9] The only thing Pico and Raphael lack is wings. This, it would seem, would be an essential element to trigger the association with contemporary observers. Yet the iconographical convention of angelic wings does not derive from a firm Scriptural tradition and was by no means universally followed. Wings in the iconography of angels made explicit what might be left ambiguous: that the figure is not just a beautiful youth, but a divine being come from above. In fact, such knowledge can usually only be gained after the fact: classical and biblical precedents abound to attest how difficult epiphanies are to immediately assess correctly.[10] Thus even without wings Raphael and Pico could be seen to conform to the typology of Renaissance angels, graced as they all were with the very attributes of youth, grace and affability.

The angelic parallel becomes even more evident when we confront the textual evidence with visual material. If the angelical quality of Pico's famous posthumous profile portrait in the Ufizzi is slightly deficient (Fig. 1), his often presumed presence in Cosimo Rosselli's fresco in the Sant'Ambrogio in

[9] Cole and Christian, 'Angels', pp. 34ff.

[10] Abraham and Lot from the Old Testament, and from the classical tradition the *Aeneid* (Aeneas and Venus in book one) and the *Odyssey* (Odysseus and Athene), for instance.

Fig. 2: Cosimo Rosselli, *Miracle of the Sacrament*, detail, fresco, Florence, church of Sant'Ambrogio, Miracle of the Sacrament Chapel. (Photo Scala, Florence)

Florence is positively angelic (Fig. 2).[11] It is thus no surprise that a similar figure in Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura has been identified by scholars both as a portrait of Pico and of an angel, an ambiguity to which we shall return (Figs. 3-4).[12] The angelic figure in figures three and four is in its turn strongly reminiscent of Raphael himself, as represented in two self-portraits and two cameo-appearances, but for his dark hair (Figs. 5 to 8). When we confront these images with figures that are unequivocally angels in Raphael's oeuvre, a generic resemblance once more is evidenced (Figs. 9-10). There is also an old tradition that the left angel attending the Virgin and Child in the masterpiece of Raphael's father Giovanni Santi, the Tiranni Chapel, is a portrait of his son, and it would be of great interest to track down whence this tradition derives. One reason for this identification would certainly be the dark hair of the angel, for angels are commonly fair, as is the one flanking the Virgin on the left. Dark-haired little Raphael, if that is who he is, would thus be identifiable on this account, because the boy was like an angel (Fig. 11). But in any case, Raphael and Pico in visual art as well resembled, wanted to resemble or were thought to resemble angels: young, tender, sweet and beautiful.

Iconographically, from a diffuse visual tradition the depiction of angels had by the latter half of the Quattrocento reached

[11] For the identification, see Gravina, *Arte e gloria delle chiese di Firenze*, p. 19.

[12] Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza*.

Fig 3: Raphael, *Disputa,* detail, Vatican City, Vatican Museums, Stanza della Segnatura.

Fig. 4: Raphael, *School of Athens,* detail, Vatican City, Vatican Museums, Stanza della Segnatura.

Fig. 5: Raphael, *Self Portrait*, c. 1500-1502, grey-black chalk heightened with white on faded paper, 38.1 × 26.1 cm, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

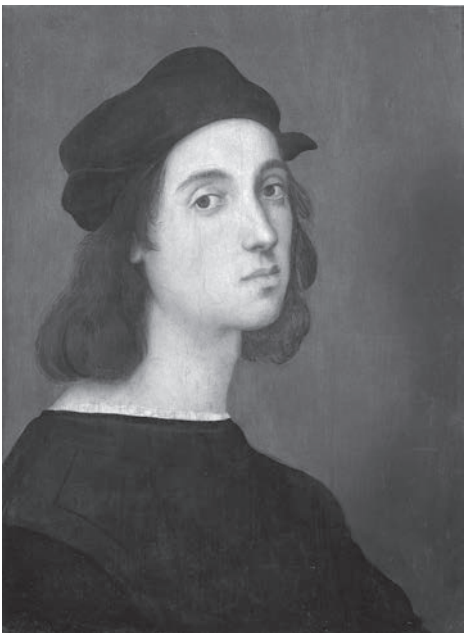

Fig. 6: Raphael, *Self Portrait*, c. 1506, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

Fig. 7: Raphael, *School of Athens*, detail of self-portrait, Vatican City, Vatican Museums, Stanza della Segnatura.

Fig. 8: Raphael, *Parnassus*, detail of self-portrait, Vatican City, Vatican Museums, Stanza della Segnatura.

Fig. 9: Raphael, *Angel,* detail, 1500-1501, oil on panel, 31 × 26 cm, fragment from the table of *The Coronation of St. Nicholas of Tolentino*, Brescia, Civici Musei d'Arte e Storia. (fotostudio Rapuzzi)

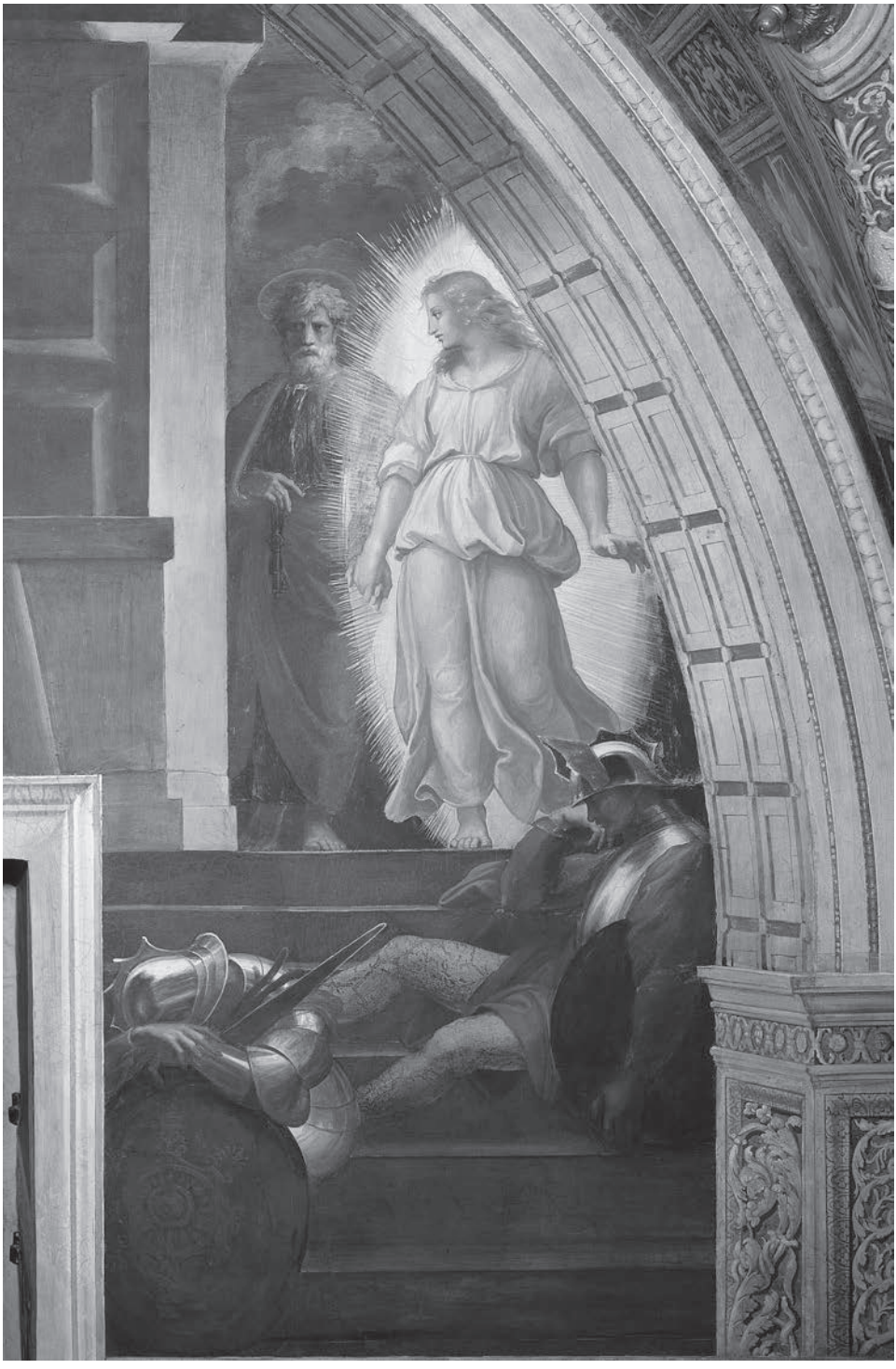

Fig. 10: Raphael, *Liberation of Saint Peter,* detail, Vatican City, Vatican Museums, Stanza d'Eliodoro.

Fig. 11: Giovanni Santi, *Sacred Conversation with Resurrection of Christ*, detail, 1481, fresco, 420 × 295 cm, Cagli, church of San Domenico, Tiranni Chapel.

a certain uniformity, prominent aspects of which are youth, fair skin, flowing hair and very often an interaction with the viewer.[13] These elements are all evidenced by the famous angel in Leonardo's *Madonna of the Rocks* (in the Louvre version), looking out to the viewer in, for an otherworldly creature, an appropriately detached yet friendly manner. The interaction with the viewer reflects the intermediary nature of angels, who function primarily as messengers, divine protectors and go-betweens between the human and the transcendent worlds. They share this function with certain young male saints, especially the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist, who likewise mediate between the world of the Christian God on the one, and that of human sinners on the other.[14] In Leonardo's image the angel thus becomes the mediator to the celebrant before the altar of the divine truth of the depicted scene. A parallel to this *concetto* may be recognized in the equally famous two toddlers from the *Sistine Madonna*. Yet here the conceit is taken further and wittily twisted by Raphael: for the angels here are *putti*, and have as yet neither attained a full head of flowing hair nor a torso of burgeoning bodily beauty; and more importantly, as apprentices they still lack the appropriate serious attitude towards the whole mystery that is being enacted by the painting, and thus, as schoolboys will be schoolboys, look out of the window instead of attending to the lesson, for which they are

[13] Dunstan and Nesselrath, *Angels from the Vatican*; Brown and Van Nimmen, *Raphael*, pp. 17-23.

[14] See Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art,* I, pp. 157-163.

kindly rebuked by the look of Saint Barbara. My point is that the irony of these *putti* is dependent upon the convention of angels interacting with humans.[15] But another point to make in this connection is that the function of angels (and saints like John the Baptist or John the Evangelist) as mediators could be considered analogous to that of the artist himself, who after all provides the means to the viewer to enter the other world of religion, and thus functions as mediator.[16] Another parallel from Raphael's works is interesting from this perspective. In the portrait of the banker Bindo Altoviti, now in Washington, (Fig. 12) the young banker is shown in the same angelic idiom as the examples we have so far discussed. Yet, for centuries it was identified as a self-portrait of Raphael, illustrating the extent to which traditions concerning the painter himself had become assimilated to an angelic model. Of course, self-portraits naturally interact with the viewer through the mirror indispensable for their production. But perhaps rather than the origin of the iconography of self-portraits, the mirror, its result, namely the fact that self-portraits conventionally interact with the viewer associated those portrayed with other intermediary figures known from iconography. As to Bindo, David Allen Brown has pointed out that the angelic, youthful and androgynous type had been adopted already by Leonardo's Milanese pupils to depict ideal male beauty, and Raphael followed this iconographical convention in the Altoviti portrait.[17] The fascinating phenomenon is that Raphael used this same convention in his self-representations. Not only that: the convention is also paralleled by the representation of Pico della Mirandola. The question in this context is of course: was this angelic persona created by these men themselves and on purpose, and if so what purpose?

To begin with Raphael: the suggestions in the texts and images adduced above of some kind of angelic nature in Raphael, have a concrete source: for Raphael was, of course, named after the homonymous archangel, kind Raphael who helps Tobit, and whose name was commonly glossed as *medicina dei*, the healing that comes from God. The similarity between his early self-portraits and his famous and elegant depiction of an angel for his first major commission in Città di Castello (Fig. 9) suggests that some link between name and nature of the painter was formed in his early youth. This is confirmed by the above mentioned early tradition that Raphael's father, Giovanni Santi, expressed the likeness of his son in the left angel of his *Sacra Conversazione* in the Tiranni Chapel in Cagli.

It is very likely that in the case of Raphael, the *nomen est omen* principle was seen by his environment to operate most fortunately. The looks of the young painter from Urbino appeared to square with the iconography of angelic, ideal and youthful

[15] See also Kempers, '"Capella Iulia"'; Oberhuber, *Raphael,* p. 132 as well as Jones and Penny, *Raphael*, p. 128.

[16] See further Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics*, Ch. 1.

[17] Brown and Van Nimmen, *Raphael,* p. 18 with literature.

Fig. 12 Raphael, *Bindo Altoviti*, c. 1515, oil on panel, 59.7 × 43.8 cm, Washington, D.C., National Gallery, Samuel H. Kress Collection.

beauty. Raphael's name, then, would have provided an offer that could not be refused when he grew up to be such a charming young man, and a tradition was formed, most likely originating in the family Santi itself, that ascribed angelic qualities to Raphael. Yet I think there is more to it than this. We know that the cultural milieu of the Santi was very sophisticated.[18] Father Giovanni was an accomplished painter, as could recently be verified in an extensive exhibition at Urbino, perhaps not a genius, but hardly a dauber. His importance as a deviser of court festivities has recently been documented.[19] Such a commission would also make him a humanist, that is, one usually consulted in these matters to provide texts, parallels and interpretations. As a humanist also, of course, he wrote the famous *Cronaca rimata* on the heroic feats of Federico da Montefeltro, with its famous and important excursus on art, exemplifying his familiarity with all important painters of his time.[20] As a courtier of repute in Urbino's *Palazzo Ducale* he was moreover in the middle of the artistic, humanistic and philosophical avant garde, for that court indeed was highly fashionable, outdid a cultural centre like Perugia and could rival with the most prestigious circles in Florence.[21] The nature of the Urbinate court has left deep imprints on Raphael. Three aspects of relevance present themselves. First, Federico's intention seems to have been to attempt to select the best of intellectual and artistic accomplishments of its multifarious surroundings, be it Venice, Ferrara, Florence or Flanders, forming from these, as it were, a micro-cosmos of excellence. To this preference for eclecticism over *Campanilismo* Raphael's genius is indebted in no small way. Also, in the second place, it has in recent years become ever more evident that Federico himself was a master public image-fashioner, spinning his profile of prince of peace deftly to cover the darker sides of his military adventures. In this artistic and intellectual milieu, Raphael sought out his role, or had one sought out for him. But perhaps the most important point concerns the philosophy of art.

A splendid example of Federico's ability in this respect is his patronage of Florentine Neo-Platonic philosophy in the form of Cristoforo Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, dedicated to the Duke by the author, a text in praise of Federico's combination of the active and contemplative life.[22] Landino's text contains an important section on poetry, in which the philosophy of art that had been developed especially by Marsilio Ficino is elucidated.[23] Departing from the traditional divine nature of poetry, the respectability of which had been firmly re-established in Florentine circles already in the Trecento, Ficino extended the mediating role of poetry between the divine and the secular world to human creativity, and hence to the arts in general. Human creativity, mirroring that of its Divine Creator, could assume the form

[18] See now Mochi Onori, *Raffaello e Urbino* and Caldari, *L'ambiente artistico*.

[19] Arbizzoni, 'Le arti sorelle'.

[20] Butler, 'La "Cronaca rimata"'.

[21] Perini, 'Raphael'.

[22] Clough, 'Art as Power'.

[23] Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics*, pp. 36-39.

of an essential link in the Neo-Platonic chain of Grace, Grace that was effused by the Deity and was to be returned by his human counterpart in the form of beautiful creations, completing a cosmic dance of beauty and happiness.[24] This very creation of beauty, both in visual art and poetry, could show the divine and make it accessible to human perception. Art and its creation of beauty were thus considered as a mediator between this world and the transcendent world — the idea regarding poetry was hardly new, but the extension to visual art was. The connection between Landino and Urbino coupled to Giovanni Santi's important role and intellectual prominence at Federico's court make it very likely that Santi had been introduced to these subjects.

The Santi family thus was connected in Urbino with three phenomena: eclecticism, the *arcana imperii* of self-representation through art and patronage, and the new philosophy of art. Given the early adoption of young Raphael in his father's workshop, his continued presence there and his close connections to the court and intellectual life of Urbino,[25] we may not only assume that Giovanni passed the quintessence of this culture through to his son and heir, but that the latter consciously strove to integrate this culture in his work and profile. The three mentioned aspects do indeed make their appearance in the make-up of Raphael's profile and converge in the use of the image of the angel. For, first, the Florentine philosophy of art is as it were dramatized by Raphael when posing as an angelic figure in his self-portraits. Second, the relative importance of these very self-portraits in his oeuvre reflects the attention that self-fashioning received at the court of Urbino. Lastly, eclecticism: this is not only a marked characteristic of his work. It is also implied, or configured, by a specific capacity ascribed to Raphael's work by his contemporaries: the capacity to heal that is the specialty of the angel Raphael. To clarify this cryptic statement I would like to turn to some contemporary poetic tributes to the painter.

Raphael's angelic profile stayed with him throughout his life, even as he passed the threshold of youth, although, as we shall see, it was supplemented by even more divine associations. But at his premature death it was, so to say, immortalized by the unusually large number of epitaphs devoted to him. Thus the conceit surfaces in a poem by Baldassarre Castiglione, Raphael's friend who had been so intimately connected with the court at Urbino, situating his *Cortegiano* in the Palazzo Ducale and having its inhabitants articulate the synthesis of Renaissance courtesy:[26]

> Because he healed our broken bodies with the art of medicine, and recalled Hippolytus from the Stygian waters, the god of Epidaurus himself was dragged to the waves of the Styx: thus the price for life was death for the maker [of life]. You too,

[24] *Camald. Disp.* 3.1.

[25] Caldari, *L'ambiente artistico*; Perini, 'Raphael'.

[26] *Quod lacerum corpus medica sanaverit arte / Hippolytum Stygiis et revocarit aquis, / ad Stygias ipse est raptus Epidaurius undas: / sic pretium vitae mors fuit artifici. / Tu quoque, dum toto laniatam corpore Romam / componis miro, Raphael, ingenio, / atque urbis lacerum ferro, igni, annisque cadaver / ad vitam antiquum iam revocasque decus, / movisti superum invidiam; indignataque mors est / te dudum exstinctis reddere posse animam, / et, quod longa dies paulatim aboleverat, hoc te / mortali spreta lege parare iterum. / Sic, miser, heu! prima cadis intercepte iuventa, / deberi et morti nostraque nosque mones*. *Carm. Quinq.* p. 83, *de morte Raphaelis pictoris* = Shearman, *Raphael,* 1520/79, with variants. For extensive discussion see Rijser, 'The Funerary Epigrams'.

> Raphael, have moved the jealousy of the gods, while restoring Rome, her whole corpse dilapidated, with your miraculous art, and recalling to life and pristine glory the remains of a city maimed by arms, fire and age; death's indignation was aroused by your gift of returning to life what had long been extinct, and of renewing once more, disdaining the way of all flesh, what the long days of time had slowly taken away. Thus you lie, alas, miserably taken away in the prime of life, and bring home to us: we owe ourselves and all that is ours to death.

Castiglione capitalizes on the gloss of Raphael's name, *medicina dei*, and represents him as a saving angel who had brought, through his art, the divine world and its beauty and wholeness into this one — but for his mortality, which came thus as a complete surprise and shock: he who seemed an angel, apparently was only human! The important point here is that the leading *concetti* of the poem are both Raphael's role as a mediator between two worlds, and his being one who came to the aid of mankind by restoring a shattered unity. In this restorative power, and especially the method adopted by it, that of selecting examples of aesthetic excellence and putting these together in a new whole, we may easily recognize eclecticism.[27] Moreover, if we remember that in Neoplatonic thought, following Plato, all communication between mortals and the divine was effectuated through the medium of *Eros* or *Amor*,[28] who was after all the antique precursor of Christian angels, and that *grazia* or Grace was more or less the trademark of Raphael's work, we begin to see the remarkable coherence of the conceit of Raphael's assimilation to the angelic type. We may surmise that this role was one the artist sought from the early years of his career on under neoplatonic influence, either transmitted through the mediation of his father or directly through the Urbinate court. Art, so it was thought, could heal the sickness of the world by restoring ancient ruins, ancient beauty, and by completing these prophetic yet dramatically deficient phases in culture through their transference to Christianity. Yet to this effect, a mediating angel was required.

Let us now turn to Pico della Mirandola, that other angel. The description by his nephew left little to be desired with respect to an angel-like presence. Here suggestion rather than nature may have come to Pico's help. A medal with his portrait and on the obverse the Three Graces, shows us a sturdy aristocrat rather than an angel.[29] (Fig. 13) Edgar Wind has ingeniously dated that portrait around 1484, when Pico was even more frightfully young than when he wrote his most famous works.[30] Apparently, modes of representation depended on the genre adopted: for a medal, body is required, not slimness. Exhumation of his

[27] Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics*, pp. 15-31 and Rijser, 'The Funerary Epigrams'.

[28] "*Amor nodus perpetuus et copula mundi*", Ficino *de Amore* 3.3.

[29] For discussion see Wind, *Pagan Mysteries,* pp. 36-53; 65-66.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 66.

Fig. 13: Anonymous, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, c. 1484-1485, bronze, 8.1 cm, Washington, D.C., National Gallery, Samuel H. Kress Collection.

remains, the only procedure concerning the artistic past that the Italian authorities are now willing to spend lavishly on, produced not only the hypothesis that Pico was poisoned by arsenic, but more importantly in this context that he was of unusual stature, about 1.86 meter, exceeding the estimated angelic measure more than a little.[31] Where Gianfrancesco's *procera et celsa statura* read like a description of slimness, he was in fact a giant by the standards of his contemporaries. The emphasis in Gianfrancesco's biography where the angel-like description figures prominently at the outset, then, and the subsequent visual tradition, may rather be caused by a biographical interpretation of his work — a phenomenon that also significantly informs the biographies of Vasari, who transforms qualities and aspects of an artist's work into biographical facts that thus become, in a sense, allegories.[32] Of course, Pico was precocious, aristocratic and died young. But the fundamental association with the world of angels comes from his philosophical writings themselves. In the *Heptaplus*, for instance, sections of great length and complexity are devoted to the celestial and angelic worlds.[33] For brevity's sake and because of its familiarity to readers, however, I will concentrate on his

[31] Mara Amarevoli, 'Test del DNA per Pico della Mirandola', *La Repubblica,* 6 February 2008, p. 42.

[32] Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics*, pp. 66-79.

[33] See Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*.

now most famous work, the so-called *Oratio pro hominis dignitate*. This text was intended as a *prolusio* or introductory lecture to Pico's public defense of 900 theological theses in front of the Roman Curia, and therefore conceived of as a show-piece to serve as a species of preface.[34] As Karl Enenkel has shown, these prefaces often contained profile-sensitive matter.[35] As such, it may be deemed significant that angels again play a crucial role. Pico's central assertion is that of the essential freedom of man: he is free in his choice of the lineaments of his own nature, so God affirms to Adam, whence follows the famous exhortation:

> We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer.[36]

The context of this statement, however, is an exhortation to philosophy, thoroughly unexceptionable in the genre of the *prolusio* to which the oration belongs. Thus when Pico continues "if [man chooses the life of an] intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God",[37] it is to be understood that this, the angelic path, is the only right path. We must imitate the angels, the closest structural component of the Divine being the angelical intellect:

> As the sacred mysteries tell us, the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones occupy the first places; […] impatient of any second place, let us emulate their dignity and glory. And, if we will it, we shall be inferior to them in nothing.[38]

When man is called *miraculum, internuntius*, *mundi copula*, *interstitius* and chameleontic, these metaphors all spring from the image of the angel. Hence the image of Jacob's ladder, with its ascending and descending angels is adduced,[39] leading via a number of exemplary figures to the final flourish of the first part of the oration, which runs as follows:

> Let us call upon Raphael, the heavenly healer that by moral philosophy and dialectic, as with healing drugs, he may release us. When we shall have been restored to health, Gabriel, the strength of God, will abide in us. Leading us through the marvels of nature and pointing out to us everywhere the power and the goodness of God, he will deliver us finally to the care of the High Priest Michael.[40]

Since the second part of the oration, beginning after this passage, was a more technical defense against the charges of heresy brought against Pico, the part of the oration rhetorically

[34] For Latin text, discussion and recent literature see Bausi *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* and Papy,'Inleiding'.

[35] This study by Karl Enenkel is forthcoming.

[36] Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio,* lines 22-23: *Nec te celestem neque terrenum, neque mortalem neque immortalem fecimus, ut tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius honorariusque plastes et fictor, in quam malueris tute formam effingas.* 23. *Poteris in inferiora quae sunt bruta degenerare; poteris in superiora quae sunt divina ex tui animi sententia regenerari*.

[37] *Ibidem,* 29: *"si rationalia [excoluerit], caeleste evadet animal, si intellectualia angelus erit et Dei filius"*.

[38] *Ibidem*, lines 49-50, 52: "*Ibi, ut sacra tradunt mysteria, Seraphin, Cherubin et Throni primas possident; horum nos iam cedere nescii et secundarum impatientes et dignitatem et gloriam emulemur.* 53. *Erimus illis, cum voluerimus, nihilo inferiors*".

[39] *Ibidem,* 73ff.

[40] Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio,* lines 140-142: "*Et si secretiorum aliquid misteriorum fas est vel sub enigmate in publicum proferre, postquam et repens e caelo casus nostri hominis caput vertigine damnavit et iuxta Hieremiam, ingressa per fenestras mors iecur pectusque male affecit, Raphaelem coelestem medicum advocemus, qui nos morali et dialetica uti pharmacis salutaribus liberet.* 149. *Tum ad valitudinem bonam restitutos, iam Dei robur Gabriel inhabitabit, qui nos per naturae ducens miracula, ubique Dei virtutem potestatemque indicans, tandem sacerdoti summo Michaeli nos tradet qui, sub stipendiis philosophiae emeritos, theologiae sacerdotio quasi corona preciosi lapidis insignet.*"

designed to have the most spectacular impact on its public and the full weight of persuasive power, that is the end of the first part, once again very markedly flaunts the image of, on this occasion, the arch-angels. I think we must consider the given advice to employ the help of these archangels in the light of an attempt to project an arch-angelical image by the intended speaker — intended, for the oration was, of course, never pronounced: Pico was accused of heresy prior to its enunciation and had to flee Rome. But if we perform the thought experiment of a factual performance, we see Pico, a sturdy young man, transforming himself into an angel by the power of words alone. Claiming to mediate truth in the name of Christ, who was Truth itself, Pico proposes to bring about philosophical peace and theological concord by applying the principle of synthesis to the entire intellectual tradition and showing it to be in harmony. Just as man is a synthesis of all creatures, as Pico stated at the outset of the oration, so Christianity is the fulfillment and concord of all seemingly disparate and conflicting knowledge. That is the true calling, not only of philosophy, but of the philosopher himself, who performs the role of the angelic mediator of truth but also the healer, strengthener, and glorifier of God exemplified by the quoted passage. As an aristocrat, he was, and was often jokingly called, *princeps Concordiae*, because one of his fiefs was called Concordia. And even in that title, the young man endeavored to suggest, the basic unity of God's plan on all levels becomes evident. For as a *princeps* he would lead the nations to theological unity, yet not as a classical *princeps*, that is an emperor or leader, but similar to the *principes angelorum*. Thus the imperial countenance of the medal is supplemented by the image of an angel.

All this amounts, again, in an important sense to a reception of Plato's *Symposium*: there the Love that may enable us to find true happiness in the final analysis was assimilated to the philosopher Socrates, through a remarkable reversal of physical semblance (Socrates was old and ugly, and looked like Silenus) and inner content, which was of indescribable beauty.[41] It is this role Pico now appropriates, for Pico wanted to be this very philosopher. Considering his only authentic portrait on the medal and the data produced by exhumation, perhaps the intended effect of the speech capitalized on contrast between physical presence and inner content, following the Platonic precedent in the *Symposium* and the example of Socrates, rather than the conformity of angelic physical presence and angelic function: Pico played the role of an angel, like Socrates, only in his words, that is, his inner, philosophical content. Indeed, Plato has Socrates in the *Symposium* expressly warn the reader not to identify outer semblance with inner truth: that is the mistake Agathon makes. It is unlikely that this message had escaped Pico. If so, the subsequent,

[41] *Symp*. 215b ff; For the importance of Socrates for the *Oratio*, see Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio*, lines 115-116: "*Quis non Socraticis illis furoribus, a Platone in Fedro decantatis, sic afflari non velit ut alarum pedumque remigio hinc, idest ex mundo, qui est positus in maligno, propere aufugiens, ad caelestem Hierusalem concitatissimo cursu feratur?* 116. *Agemur, Patres, agemur Socraticis furoribus, qui extra mentem ita nos ponant, ut mentem nostram et nos ponant in Deo.*"

angelic tradition on Pico may very well rest on 'biografication' of the philosophical content of the *Oratio*. The description of Pico's nephew Gianfrancesco with which we began would in that case amount to a rough symbolical representation of Pico's philosophy rather than an accurate sketch of his physiognomy.[42]

Pico's *Oratio* has suffered serious misinterpretations as a manifesto of the modern concept of man, even of our heroic emancipation from the bonds of faith and the mist of medieval anonymity into proud modern individuality, as has been sufficiently disproved by scholarship of the last three decades.[43] Pico advocates the contemplative life, not that of Burckhardt's *Gewaltmensch*. His celebration of human freedom and dignity emphatically does not imply a move away from religion, on the contrary: it implies the ultimate realization of God's plan with us; lastly, Pico's alleged modernity must at least be supplemented by a remarkable old-fashionedness in its rehabilitation of scholasticism, the very scholasticism that had in some humanistic circles been attacked for being far past its sell- by date. But most important of all does the radical advocacy of our capacity to be a *plastes et fictor sui ipsius*, to be chameleonic and Protean rather imply lack of specific identity rather than its possession.[44] Thus Pico's celebration of human freedom does point at precisely the opposite of what the traditional hypothesis of the Renaissance discovery of individuality presupposed: Pico instructs his public that we may become what we want, and indeed fashion our lives. That indeed was what was happening all the time in a spectacular way in Quattrocento Italy. For Pico in the *Oratio*, there seems to be but one reasonable choice: that of an angel.[45] Raphael, apparently, followed his cue.

The salutatory message of concord was, as said, developed by Pico on many different levels: one of his main preoccupations, unfinished at the time of his early death, was the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle, which may play a role in Raphael's *School of Athens*.[46] But also the *Oration* is a specimen of the resolution of the ancient and, at that time, still raging battle between rhetoric and philosophy: the plea for the philosophical life is couched in brilliant rhetoric, a remarkably elegant Latin style and vocabulary, and great subtlety of application of the *tricolon*, which, had for Pico more than stylistic relevance alone. This fusion of style and subject matter, in the sense that the linguistic harmony was intended as a reflection of the intrinsic content, was a *leçon par l'exemple* by Pico, and has helped secure the fame of the text. It is interesting to note that, as I have argued elsewhere, one of the main *trouvailles* and hidden tricks of Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican is this very coincidence of a superbly harmonious visual style with the political content of Julius' state rooms, a content which indeed had been influenced by Pico.[47] That brings the two angels once more in line.

[42] The attempts by Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza* to identify the angelical figure in the Stanza della Segnatura (Plates 3 and 4) as Pico are misguided.

[43] For a recent overview of the literature see Papy, 'Inleiding', pp. 153-160; for the *Stand der Forschung* see also Bausi, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*.

[44] Passages conveniently assembled by Allen 'Cultura Hominis', pp. 173-175.

[45] Elsewhere he admits that there are others: man may either aspire to be pure soul, or to an angelic nature, or to a mystical oneness with the divine darkness.

[46] Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza*.

[47] Rijser, 'Phaedra'.

Pico's *Oratio* was written in 1487, four years after Raphael's birth, yet only printed two years after the philosopher's death in 1496 by his self-appointed executor Gianfrancesco Pico under the title *Oratio quaedam elegantissima* (the misnomer *de hominis dignitate* only being added in 1504 in the edition of Wimpfeling). Pico's influence on Raphael, if indeed such there was, is therefore to be dated around the turn of the century, after the loss that made Raphael's fortune, the death of his father, when Pico's influence gained impact in Florence and Rome: in the latter, extensive influence is recorded on papal librarian Tommaso Inghirami. Yet a conscious evocation of Pico's model by Raphael is not strictly necessary to account for the similarities between their respective adoption of angelic overtones: the angelical model was in the air and Pico's version hardly provided the only access to it — *teste* that other archangel, Michelangelo, of whose self-fashioning, *mutatis mutandis*, a similar reconstruction can be made, this time on the stern side. But whatever its derivation, Raphael's adoption of the angelic model allows us some observations on his self-fashioning. For apart from encoding the mediating role of art, the angel-format elegantly dramatizes the pressures any artist at the time had to cope with: while functioning in the circles of the great, he yet suffered from 'status incongruence', that is, he displayed capacities and skills that were far more prestigious than those someone from a modest social background was supposed to have. An angel was both divine and an innocent child: an artist playing such a role could thus negotiate the tensions of status-incongruence. In fact, the role of the angel could effectively create a smoke-screen to hide capacities and skills that might easily disrupt the delicate balance that the affable and delicate Raphael seemed to create so effortlessly in his dealings at court. For however communicative, social, versatile, and precocious, however gifted with a rightly immortalized capacity for the creation of order, harmony and grace, in short, however angelic Raphael may have been, there is another side to him that is obfuscated by the angelical profile.

Successful entrepreneurs seldom are naïve. Raphael's autograph letters show a complete lack of speculative thought, and keen concentration on business, expediency, foresight, money and possibilities of patronage. There really is nothing angelical about him there. Moreover fresh research has shown that Raphael, when his father died in 1494 (he was only eleven at the time), inherited the latter's extensive workshop, run together with a senior partner.[48] This rather sharply contradicts the version diffused later by Vasari that the young man was attached at an early age to Perugino, whence his fame spread and, via Florence, he attained the status of a celebrity at Rome. As is well known, Vasari's emphasis on the natural and innocent aspects

[48] Mochi Onori, *Raffaello e Urbino.*

of Raphael's angelic profile, were a rhetorical invention triggered by the natural, innocent and angelical nature of Raphael's work. Recent biographical scholarship on the painter only corroborates what was conjectured earlier: that Vasari's version of Raphael is of a radical fictionality: Raphael was, so it seems, a *padrone* at the age of eleven. He was deeply immersed in all sorts of business affairs in Urbino, and stayed so throughout his life. Instead of a pastoral youth in Urbino and then a diaspora to detach this divine creature from all too concrete origins, there is the firm and lasting Urbinate connection. The fiction, to my mind, was only elaborated and amplified by Vasari, because it already existed: Raphael himself had helped to create it. Indeed, when the proper age came, and with it enormous opulence and fame, the time seemed fit for a shift of profile, this time in the direction of Christ himself, to which he was more than once compared by contemporaries.[49]

Thus in the self-fashioning of Pico and Raphael shifts and changes occur that can only be explained by the hypothesis of conscious manipulation. Neither represents his profile exclusively or permanently. Both draw on pre-existing models, and are influenced by exigencies and contingencies of time and place, which are brought to bear on these models. Perhaps the successful self-fashioner eventually ends up believing in his self-devised role — it is difficult to tell. Yet neither the rhetoric of spin-doctoring nor the use of models needs to imply a lack of integrity on their part. If Pico and Raphael have indeed, like so many other great figures of their time, been able to successfully manipulate their posthumous fate, there is no reason to doubt that with that manipulation went the firm conviction that, in the final reckoning, their individual personalities were to be effaced in the grand cosmic scheme of Christ's truth and beauty. As so often, their experiments with public profile attest both to an active, individual role of self-fashioning, and to the Christian anonymity to which they eventually aspired.

[49] Tebaldeo's epigram is the most obvious example. See further Perini, 'Carmi inediti'; Shearman, *Raphael*; Rijser, *Raphael's Poetics*.